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Strategies to Advance Antiracist Programs: Why They Matter

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Cover Page Footnote

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Strategies to Advance Antiracist Programs: Why They Matter

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Abstract. The U.S. Extension system has been aware for many years of the racial inequality and disparities present today and throughout U.S. history. Even though there have been concerted efforts in Extension to improve racial equity and inclusion, much work remains. A dual approach is proposed for Extension to focus both internally (program planners) and externally (program participants) to bring about antiracist programs that are inclusive and racially equitable. Research-based strategies are discussed for both domains of program planners (e.g., implicit bias training) and program participants (e.g., reach people of color through culturally relevant curricula).

INTRODUCTION

Thirty years ago, the *Journal of Extension* published a commentary article by Tompkins (1992) titled “Alternatives: Get Mad, Give Up, Make Changes.” The author stated, “As I write, Los Angeles burns. For several days now, I’ve been trying to sort out my own feelings and attitudes as I respond to questions and assertions from my children and my colleagues at work” (Tompkins, 1992, p. 1). Los Angeles was burning because of the acquittal of police officers involved in the savage 1991 beating of Rodney King, a Black man who was pulled over for speeding. Tompkins makes the point that getting mad and giving up are not productive avenues through which to address racism and discrimination, but rather one must “assume personal responsibility for helping to change attitudes and behavior” (p. 2).

Fast-forward more than 30 years, and the question remains: what has changed or improved over the past 3 decades to end racism and advance racial equity? There are many indications that nothing has changed; in fact, the situation may be worse. In 2015, there was a mass murder of nine people at an African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina, which was determined to be a hate crime. There is the ever-growing number of deadly police killings of unarmed African Americans. According to a U.S. database that tracks fatal shootings, African Americans have been killed by police at more than twice the rate of White Americans (“Fatal Force,” 2022).

During the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, many of the attackers were flying a Confederate flag—a symbol of White supremacy. In 2022, 10 Black people were massacred in a Buffalo, New York, grocery store that primarily served the Black community. The shooter planned the attack for months and is described as a White supremacist motivated by racism (“Online Radicalisation,” 2022). The Department of Homeland Security (2020) has described White supremacists as “the most persistent and lethal threat” in the United States (p. 18). There is criticism of the Black Lives Matter effort because it does not focus on everyone. However, a key point of the Black Lives Matter movement is that for all lives to matter, Black lives must matter too.

To be transparent about my background before getting into the body of this article, I want to be clear that I am a White male who has had all the advantages of my race, gender, and majority characteristics long accepted by society. I know I have been privileged over the years and at the expense of others who were disadvantaged. I was fortunate to be raised in an all-Black church in Louisiana as a preacher’s kid in the 1960s and early 1970s. These formative years imprinted upon me a love and care for the Black community. That experience greatly shaped my beliefs and attitudes, influencing who I am today. Even though it was difficult for my family to be on the receiving

end of KKK cross-burnings, harassment, and hate—especially directed toward my parents—this experience pales in comparison to the ongoing, centuries-long struggle of oppression and racism against Blacks and people of color in the United States.

Tompkins (1992, p. 2) concludes her article by commending the Cooperative Extension System for “explicitly tackling diversity, but I also hope that each of us accepts the personal responsibility that’s ours as citizens of this multicultural democracy.” I agree with Tompkins’ statement. But what impact have we made to stop or even slow racism and ensure racial equity within Extension? Where will Extension be another 30 years from now, in the 2050s, regarding ending oppression and discrimination for African Americans and people of color? What can we, as Extension professionals, do differently?

STRATEGIES FOR ANTIRACIST PROGRAMS

Racism survives and thrives, century after century, because it is systemic. As an organization, Extension has made efforts to confront racial inequalities over the years. Unfortunately, there is much more to be done, as highlighted in the article by Walcott et al. (2020) and the team that was part of the Coming Together for Racial Understanding Initiative. They declare that:

If Extension does not take steps to address systemic inequities within its own institutions and programs, structures that harm both staff and communities will be perpetuated, and the ability of staff to effectively facilitate dialogues on race will be limited. (Walcott et al., 2020, Perceptions section, para. 8)

Using foundational and historical reviews of 4-H, Webster (2021) makes a strong argument in a *Journal of Extension* commentary article that U.S. 4-H programs must do much more to be inclusive and diverse. She provides recommendations for change with a focus on accountability and action. It is crucial that we heed these charges if we are to lead in our communities, train volunteers, and plan/deliver programs that work toward racial equity as antiracists. Antiracists are those who support antiracist policies and express antiracist ideas that lead to racial equity (Kendi, 2019). Kendi describes that being an antiracist is “like fighting an addiction” and “requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination” (p. 23).

It is evident that within Extension there must be internal training, dialogue, and administrative leadership for program planners to advance racial equity. Racial equity is achieved when racial identity does not predict access to opportunity or success in life, because practices and policies that advantage one group but oppress another are identified and eliminated (National Equity Project, n.d.). To promote equity and inclusion of all, Extension must value and appreciate the ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity/demographic characteristics of program participants and those not yet served. As depicted in Figure 1, I believe it is important to stress that Extension leadership should coordinate within both domains—those of program planners and program participants—for effective, antiracist program delivery and outcomes to achieve racial equity and community well-being.

PROGRAM PLANNER DOMAIN

The program planner domain encompasses internal efforts to raise Extension professionals’ and volunteers’ awareness and understanding of practices to enhance racial equity. There are numerous examples of efforts within this domain in empirical/theoretical *Journal of Extension* articles. Examples include Navigating Difference, a cultural competency training for Extension professionals developed by Washington State University Extension (Deen et al., 2014). Through evaluation, Deen and colleagues found that Extension professionals’ knowledge, attitude, and behavior improved for cultural competency (awareness, understanding, knowledge, interaction, and sensitivity) after participating in the training. Smith and Wiley (2021) provide best practices and strategies to integrate underutilized Black volunteers in 4-H and other Extension programs and thereby increase minority program participation. McKee and Bruce (2019) highlight the importance of self-awareness of Extension professionals’ biases that interfere with inclusion, word choices, and program decisions (e.g., meet in neighborhood recreation centers rather than a hard-to-reach Extension office) to create inclusive Extension programs.

PROGRAM PARTICIPANT DOMAIN

The program participant domain centers on those audiences external to Extension, with a focus on people of color, to build a more inclusive and diverse Extension audience. However, it is critical to create an environment in which

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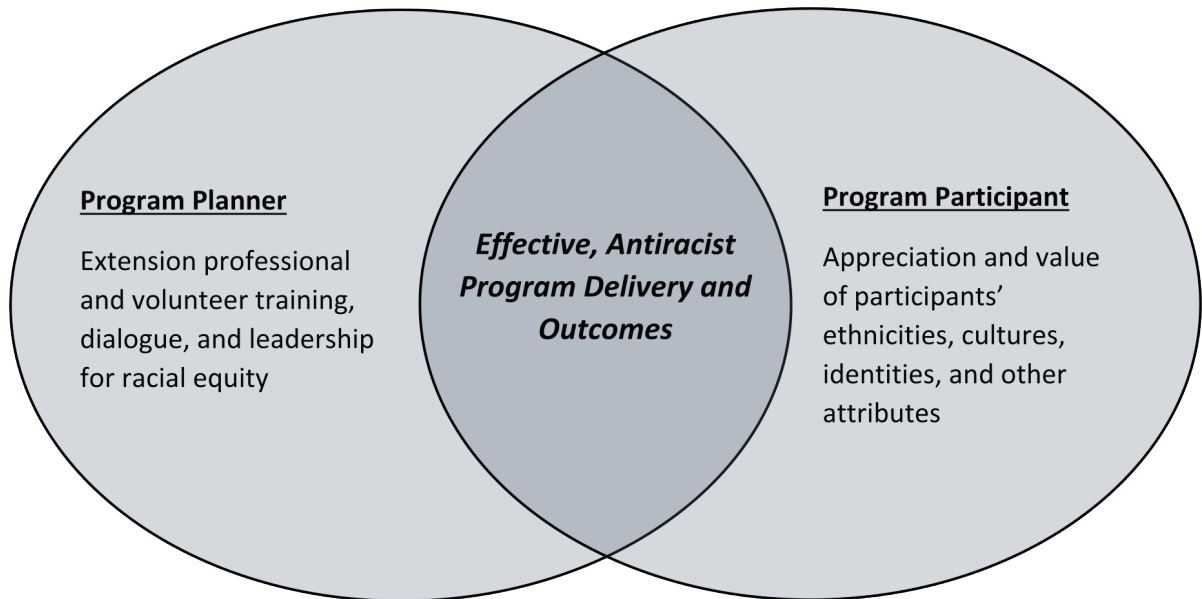


Figure 1. Venn diagram for effective, antiracist program delivery and outcomes.

all program participants—especially White participants—promote inclusion and racial equity. One published example of this inclusion is to include strategies for 4-H programs to reach and recruit African American male youth (Webster & Smith, 2018). Webster and Smith reported that strategies of culturally relevant programming (i.e., inclusivity and identity) contributed to African American male participation. In North Carolina, storytelling was a strategy used for youth participants to increase awareness of power/privilege and difference while helping them feel confident to bring about social change (Gonzalez et al., 2020). In a study about the decline of African American-owned forest lands, the use of forestry assistance programs reportedly helped reduce African American land loss (Christian et al., 2013). Strategies mentioned in the study included networking with Black organizations and providing legal services aid with a focus on the historical, sociocultural, and economic experiences of Black clientele. These are examples of programs that emphasize participants' ethnicity, culture, and identity.

To create effective, antiracist Extension programs, it is essential to focus not only on groups internal to Extension (program planners) but to be intentional in reaching out to those external to Extension (program participants), especially those who are Black, Indigenous, or otherwise people of color. As illustrated in Figure 1, both domains must intersect to advance racially equitable Extension programs. Corresponding strategies are given in Table 1 for program planner and program participant domains.

An example of including both domains in program development is California Extension's 3-year professional development model (program planner) to promote inclusion and diversity for people of color (program participants), which used strategies such as devising new club models and using culturally-relevant curriculum (Moncloa et al., 2019). With the state's 50% Latino youth population, the initiative resulted in a 151% increase in the participation of Latino youth in 4-H programs. Another example are Webster's (2021) recommendations to increase 4-H diversity and inclusion, as they encompass both program planner (e.g., devote and support equitable Extension employment at all levels) and program participant (e.g., use culturally relevant materials and evaluation tools) domains.

CONCLUSIONS

One strength of the U.S. Extension system is its mission and vision approach to outreach education driven by conditions and needs. This guiding principle allows for programs to address community needs and complex challenges, including those of racial equity. Extension is positioned to lead local, community-level changes that make a difference for racial justice through flexible, pluralist strategies rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. But

Table 1. Program Planner and Program Participant Domain Strategies to Deliver Effective Antiracist Programs in Extension

Domain	Strategies
Program Planner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in dialogue to facilitate racial equity by addressing systemic inequities in our institutions and programs Offer cultural competency training, including the understanding of privilege, power, and oppression Practice self-awareness to understand where we are individually with respect to positionality and racial issues Use intentional decision-making processes to offer programs to diverse audiences in their neighborhoods and schools Offer professional development to advance inclusion and diversity, such as implicit bias education
Program Participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach and engage with African Americans, Indigenous peoples, and other people of color through programs with an emphasis on inclusivity and diversity Market programs that are culturally relevant and support identity development Ensure programs focus on participants' identity, culture, and ethnicity Match mentors with participants to serve as positive role models (e.g., parents, youth, farmers) Use program delivery methods such as storytelling to validate participants' realities and create a caring climate for all

there is much work to be done, both internally as we improve our programs and externally as we strive to reach more diverse audiences.

What we must do differently moving forward is use both program planner and participant domain strategies in tandem to deliver effective, antiracist programs (i.e., intersection zone in Figure 1). Extension can be a catalyst for racial equity and healing by delivering inclusive programs and changing our policies so we function as a more inclusive and antiracist organization. We must continue an active pursuit of this work and challenge ourselves to make the necessary changes to achieve our goal of having a racially-just U.S. Extension System.

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